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Abstract
In discussing Passover the Bible states that "in every generation a person is obligated to view himself as if he too had journeyed out of Egypt." Jews have taken up this call, and on the night of April 12th Jews from all over the world will sit down to retell and relive the Exodus at a Seder - the festive meal of Passover. Indeed eighty-three percent of American Jews report that they attend Seders as opposed to the fifty-three percent who report to belong to a Synagogue.

Comments
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The Contemporary Haggadot
Interrelations between Text and Iconography

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In discussing Passover the Bible states that "in every generation a person is obligated to view himself as if he too had journeyed out of Egypt." Jews have taken up this call, and on the night of April 12th Jews from all over the world will sit down to retell and relive the Exodus at a Seder- the festive meal of Passover. Indeed eighty-three percent of American Jews report that they attend Seders as opposed to the fifty-three percent who report to belong to a Synagogue.

The centerpiece of the Seder is the Haggadah- a composition of prayers, stories, sayings, and songs that have become canonized in Jewish liturgy. In the course of the Seder, the family or small group utilizes the Passover Haggadah as a means to remember the Israelites' exodus from Egypt and to re-live that exodus. The oldest extant version is contained in the prayer book of Saadiah Gaon in 10th century Babylon. Every year dozens of new Haggadot are created; some stay true to the text while others do not; some are scholarly while others are artistic. There are over 3,000 Haggadot in print today and countless more unpublished Haggadot that are created and used by individual families.

In my paper I will examine the way contemporary artists use illustrations in the Haggadah to serve as a visual commentary to the text. By looking at the interplay between the images and words I will see if there has been a development of a new iconography in contemporary illustrated Haggadot.

Haggadot have been illustrated since very early in their history. There were traditions of Haggadah decoration in the Middle Ages both in Spanish and Provencal communities and also in the German communities known as Ashkenaz. Most of these volumes were lavish manuscripts commissioned by specific patrons. With the advent of

printing, the Haggadah became a very popular work to publish in illustrated form. The proliferation of illustrated Haggadot is unusual in that religious iconography of the bible text is problematic in Judaism, due to the Second Commandment prohibition against graven images. Haggadah illustrations are popular because there are no religious prohibitions against illustrations as there are with other religious objects such as a Torah scroll. The Haggadah is a small-scale text; it is meant to be read in a domestic family and small group setting rather than in the synagogue. It is meant to spark interest and questions in those hearing it and reading it during the Seder; this is particularly the case for the children who are participating in the ritual event. As a result, Haggadah illustrations have always been an integral part of expounding and interpreting the narrative in the course of the Seder.

In general, the Second Commandment was not seen as prohibiting all artistic representation in medieval manuscripts – it was seen as a specific prohibition on idol worship. When Jews opposed representational art it was mainly due to surrounding cultural attitudes like Jews in Muslim countries influenced by Muslim prohibitions. In South Germany in the 12th and 13th centuries Jews were influenced by ascetic Christian movements.

One example of artists attempting to bypass the convention of not depicting faces of actual people in art is what is commonly referred to as the Bird's Head Haggadah. This manuscript Haggadah was created in South Germany in 1300 and all the figures' heads are replaced with that of birds. Generally medieval manuscript Haggadot produced in Spanish or Sephardic communities are marked by full page illustrations of biblical stories – not only of the Exodus. The famous Sarajevo Haggadah shows a cycle from Creation to

the death of Moses. Those in Ashkenazi communities, however, were mainly illustrated by pictures of the Seder itself- the Matzah and Maror (bitter herbs), the Rabbis listed in the text, and the Four Sons. Usually the illustrations in medieval Ashkenazi Haggadot are in the margin. Often there are illustrations to show the preparations for Pesach; some show families sitting at the Seder, some have illustrations of Elijah as the harbinger of the Messiah.

The illustrations of Biblical scenes in Haggadot in the Middle Ages often incorporated legends from the Midrash or Jewish interpretations of episodes- such as Abraham destroying the idols in his father' s house which is not in the Biblical text. Medieval scribes and illuminators often used the letters of the text themselves as decorations – in micrography, in extending ascenders and descenders of individual letters and in highlighting initial words in paragraphs. (As the Hebrew alphabet had no capital letters, there were rarely initial decorated letters.

Other illustrated Haggadot followed. With the flowering of art books in the 20th century, many more Haggadot were produced, often in limited editions. I have been exploring, through examination of many such Haggadot and conversations with individual Haggadah artists whether there are common artistic themes in these Haggadot and how much the artists draw from classic Haggadah illustrations.

My research has shown that twentieth century Haggadot have been dedicated to modern themes and phenomena such as the State of Israel, the Holocaust, the Soviet Jewry movement, and the Kibbutz movement. Many famous Jewish artists like Ben Shahn and Leonard Baskin have produced their own Haggadot.

Modern illustrated Haggadot, published in the past twenty years, look at all of these issues as well as issues of women's equality, tensions between Diaspora and Israel, and science and technology. Artists of these modern Haggadot have used images to enhance, distort, and sometimes subvert the meaning of the text in effect using the illustrations as a visual form of commentary.

There are a few important contemporary illuminated Haggadot, including the work of Yael Hirchberg whose Jerusalem Haggadah melds manuscript and architecture to give a history of the Jewish people through the sites of Jerusalem, and Ben Simon who creates iconography through linoleum cuts and uses a caricature style in order to provoke questions. Barry Ivker uses the medium of digital prints and paper cuts, while Tamar Messer uses silk screens to produce folk images.

But I would like to focus on two of the most influential modern Haggadot --the Moss Haggadah and the Moriah Haggadah.

The Moss Haggadah was commissioned by patrons in 1984, and the Haggadah revived the art of the illuminated manuscript in contemporary Judaica. In his Haggadah, David Moss views the role of the Haggadah on Passover and in Judaism in a particular way. Moss uses art as the medium in which to express his concept of a Haggadah and his whole concept of Jewish existence and history. Throughout, he is extremely conscious of his role as a Jewish artist and how his work relates to his predecessors. Moss views the Haggadah as more than a text used on Passover; he considers the Haggadah as encapsulating the entire Jewish experience. Over the course of the text one sees his views on Jewish history and Jewish continuity reflected in the Haggadah. An integral part of the edition is Moss's explanations for all his techniques, his sources and the inspiration for

his layout, specific iconography, calligraphy etc. In his attempt to weave together all of Jewish history and culture into this one text, Moss has created a powerful educational tool that places the Seder not only as the epicenter of the Exodus story but the epicenter of all of Jewish history.

Throughout the Haggadah, Moss draws on his knowledge of different Hebrew scripts, and of traditional Jewish art like paper cuts, and micro-calligraphy. Here is an example of him using both. In this folio he draws on two much used series in medieval manuscripts- illustrations of Jews as slaves in Egypt and illustrations of Jews preparing for the holiday of Passover. According to Moss these two are connected, as one series depicts Jews serving the Egyptians through manual labor and one depicts the Jews serving God through worship. Through an intricate papercut Moss merges these two images by displaying contrary activities back to back. Each panel shows the silhouette doing different work and mirroring each other. Surrounding this paper cut is an elaborate border made up of microcalligraphy. On one side Moss draws verses from the Bible that refer to the children of Israel as servants of other nations and on the other he draws verses that deal with them serving God. In this image Moss is drawing on traditions of Jewish Art. The artistic forms of paper cut and microcalligraphy are distinctly Jewish art forms. By drawing on these two art forms as well as medieval images Moss is placing his iconography in dialogue with traditional texts.

Moss also draws on his knowledge of modern science. On Passover one is forbidden from eating leavened bread. On the night before Passover it is traditional to search to see if there are any traces bread left in your home. Moss takes the prayer that is

recited before the search for any remaining crumbs and playfully asks how far this needs to go?

On the right side Moss draws a progressively closer and deeper examination of the wheat, Going from a head of wheat, to individual grains, to the structure of the enzyme's DNA, he takes a drawing of wheat and cuts in down further and further to its last remaining particle. Next to each roundel is a portion from Maimonides, a 12th century Jewish philosopher, Code of Laws that deal with this topic. Moss adds depth to this cursory prayer and broadens it to ask what it means to search and what does research itself mean?

Throughout the text Moss expands the focus of the Haggadah from just the story of the Exodus into the story of all Jewish history. Moss takes the textual reminder that in every generation a person must see himself as if he had gone out of Egypt as a reference to Jewish history in general. He creates a portrait gallery comprising all generations of the Jewish people. He then creates a mirror for each person in the gallery. So when the book is closed each portrait sees itself. However when the book is open it allows us- our current generation- to see ourselves as well.

Avner Moriah's Haggadah created in 2005 uses his personal story as a basis for his commentary. Unlike Moss, Moriah is a secular Israeli. While he was researching and illustrating this project his wife was being treated with chemotherapy. Discussing the Haggadah, he said, "When I started the images were really small but as she got healthier, they became more colorful and more lively. When I finished and she recovered I realized that I had painted my own journey out of Egypt."

For Moriah the story of the Haggadah has direct relevance for today. Throughout his Haggadah he compares the slavery in Egypt to daily life. The frontispiece is a roundel, an art form he uses throughout the Haggadah that reflection the repetitions and circularity of life. In it Moriah depicts fourteen parts of the Exodus and fourteen corresponding parts of the life of his investment banker friend in Englewood, New Jersey. Wedges slice through the rings connecting one element of the workday, to one element of the Exodus and one from the Seder. By inserting a commute across the George Washington Bridge into the Passover liturgy, Moriah is asking the question "Am I free or not?"

Another theme in Moriah's Haggadah is the balance between the sacred and the mundane. Again Moriah uses the roundel as the best way to convey his point. On the left side are eight regular day activities such as attending a concert or watching television; on the right side are eight individual Seder nights. The center of the circle contains images of the two nights balanced on a pyramid fulcrum. The text matching this statement asks why is this night different from other nights. Moriah uses his illustration to extend the meaning of the text. While the text mentions only different ritual food eaten on Passover, Moriah ask how is the Passover night different in all respect.

One of the most interesting aspects of Moriah's work is that he actively reads women into the text through his art. Moriah illustrates verses that have not been traditionally depicted to do this. One example is that in the Haggadah that quoted chapters from the Bible, Moriah picks the verse that comments on the fertility of the children of Israel. He gives that verse an entire page, adding in verses from Ezekiel about

childbirth. On the opposite page he depicts women in various stages of childbirth. He is giving women a voice in Jewish history.

Moriah also adds the Cup of Miriam as an alternate to the cup of Elijah. In the roundel Moriah uses the outer circle and draws on biblical commentaries that state the Israelites were saved due to the righteousness of women in that generation.
In the middle he places Miriam “dancing with the timbrels” after the crossing of the Read Sea.

According to Moriah, "The text is very visual. Most people in Judaism don't look at the text as a visual text but look at more as a verbal text I treated it in a different way, here it is all about the visuals."

For many artists today Haggadah illustration is a personal dialogue with a classic text. Artists are constantly pushing the boundaries of traditional notions of Jewish Art through the use of innovative materials and techniques. As seen from the Moss and Moriah Haggadot each modern Haggadah is very different and unique. Each chooses different passages to illustrate and different points to emphasize. However all these artists are in constant dialogue with their traditional iconographic sources and with the contemporary meaning of the text they illustrate. Perhaps it is this freedom to extend, distort, and even subvert the meaning of the text itself that makes it truly modern.